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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 001385

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SUBJECT: COMMONWEALTH ON FIJI, SRI LANKA, NIGERIA, QUEEN'S
SUCCESSION, AND THE VALUE TO USG OF COMMONWEALTH ENGAGEMENT

REF: LONDON 580

Classified By: Political Counselor Richard Mills, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary. During a June 11 discussion with Poloff, Commonwealth Political Director Amitav Banerji offered electoral commission capacity-building as an area where the USG and Commonwealth could be strategic partners; said a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) would soon discuss and likely recommend full suspension of Fiji; noted concern about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka; and indicated the Commonwealth is keeping a watchful eye on Nigeria because of the constitutional crisis that could ensue if President Yar'Adua dies. While noting that it was not actively being discussed, Banerji acknowledged that succession of the Head of the Commonwealth would have to be dealt with when Queen Elizabeth passes, as there is no rule stipulating that the British monarch is the head and no procedure for selecting a new head. End Summary.

USG Engagement

12. (C) Commonwealth Secretariat Director of Political Affairs Amitav Banerji reiterated to Poloff Commonwealth SYG Kamallesh Sharma's desire for "strategic engagement" with the USG on June 11. Noting the important role of electoral commissions in conducting credible elections, Banerji said Sharma hopes to create a network of electoral commissions across the Commonwealth, whereby newer commissions in fragile democracies could receive guidance and support from commissions in more established democracies. He offered this initiative as an example of where the USG and Commonwealth have mutual interests and where the USG could use the Commonwealth's technical electoral commission capacity-building capability and independent, "baggage free" status to promote democracy abroad.

Fiji

13. (C) Noting that the Commonwealth had past the deadline set at the May CMAG meeting to re-consider full suspension of Fiji (reftel), Banerji said he was very "frustrated" that CMAG had not yet met to discuss Fiji, especially as the Commonwealth's credibility could be damaged by not taking a decision as indicated at the last meeting. He said CMAG had not met purely for scheduling reasons, and that the Secretariat hopes to hold the meeting by the end of the month, though he was not confident it would be possible. He thought CMAG would move for full suspension of Fiji,

intimating there had been difficult discussions at the previous CMAG meeting on Fiji with New Zealand pushing hard for full suspension and Malaysia wanting to ensure that Fiji did not withdraw from the Commonwealth to pre-empt a full suspension a la Zimbabwe.

Sri Lanka

¶4. (C) Banerji said that the human rights situation in Sri Lanka during and after the recent military offensive had been raised "informally and off the record" by the UK during the last CMAG meeting, forcing a difficult conversation with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, as Sri Lanka is currently a member of CMAG. Banerji said the Commonwealth continues to watch the situation in Sri Lanka and noted that Sri Lanka's offer to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) had been turned down over concerns about lending international credibility to the Government's actions.

Nigeria

¶5. (C) The Commonwealth is also keeping a watchful eye on Nigeria, Banerji noted, as it is "punching well below its weight" and President Yar'Adua's sudden death has the potential to prompt a constitutional crisis. The Commonwealth would like to see Nigeria more active in the region and in the Commonwealth across the board. Banerji noted that Yar'Adua did not make a single intervention at the last CHOGM, contrasting sharply with former President Obasanjo

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who had been active in Commonwealth affairs.

Succession of the Head of the Commonwealth

¶6. (C) Banerji acknowledged that succession of the Head of the Commonwealth would have to be dealt with when Queen Elizabeth passes, as there is no rule stipulating that the British monarch is the head and no procedure for selecting a new head. He acknowledged that heir-apparent to the British Crown, Prince Charles, does not "command the same respect" as the Queen and said the Commonwealth was trying quietly to get him more involved in Commonwealth affairs. Banerji noted Marlborough House, the Commonwealth Secretariat's current location, was a royal property, owned and funded by the British Royal Family, and mused that may be a factor in the discussions. He noted that succession was not actively being discussion within the Commonwealth.

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